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NEW TYPE OF THE WEATHERVANE

BY ROBERT H. VAN COURT

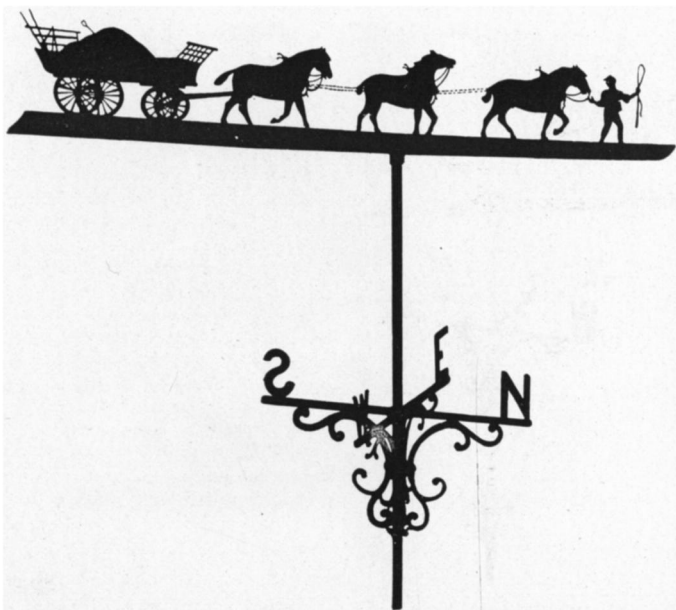
ANYONE who studies, however casually, the details of the architecture and decoration of the past can hardly fail to be impressed with the care and thought which even the most eminent of architects and the most skillful of designers bestowed upon what are often regarded today as the most trivial of accessories. Sir Christopher Wren designed many of the small details of his great English churches, and such master designers and craftsmen as Adam and Cellini, and a host of others lavished their skill and care upon the making of objects often small and relatively unimportant.

Modern architects and craft workers are acquiring much of this old time point of view. After all the effect of a finished and completed work is dependent not wholly upon the beauty of the fundamental features of decoration; they are readily seen and instantly appreciated, but symmetry and complete harmony require that the entire work be consistent, and consistency places a high value upon the careful

and thoughtful planning and working out of many small details.

The weathervane, always useful and frequently picturesque, is among what may be called the accessories of building which are just now receiving their share of attention, and it is being raised from the forlorn and lowly state into which it has fallen through long ages of neglect. So completely have the weathervane's decorative possibilities been overlooked, that until comparatively recently hardly any one has seemed to imagine a vane in any more interesting garb than that of an arrow or perhaps of a bronze or gilded steed prancing through the air above a barn or a stable. It has required the force of example—readily supplied by a few notable architects—to demonstrate and make plain the latent possibilities which the weathervane holds forth.

The vane, in one form or another, is exceedingly ancient, and its use extends far back into that dim and uncertain period of time when the light of recorded history

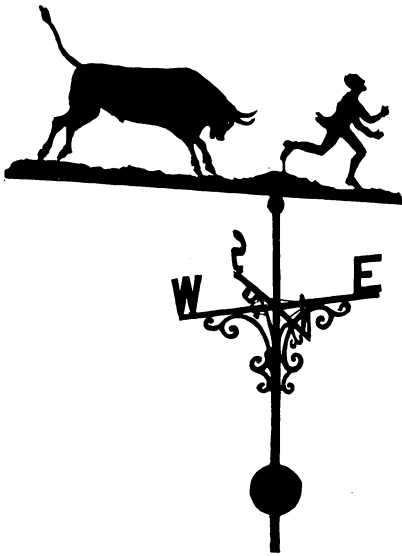


VANE ON LEWIS ESTATE, MAHWAH, N. J., DESIGNED BY ALFRED HOPKINS

gives way to the twilight of tradition. The name in its historic sense signifies something spread out, and quite possibly the earliest of weathervanes was a battle flag placed upon the ramparts of a fortress. One of the most famous relics of antiquity at Athens is the "Tower of the Winds" or horologium built by Andronicus, a Greek astronomer, about 100 B. C. The building is really a much glorified weathervane, for upon its eight sides are portrayals of the eight winds of heaven, while upon the summit a bronze Triton, turned about by every passing breeze, pointed the direction from which the wind proceeded. Another form of the weathervane, very ancient and yet still in use, particularly upon sailing vessels of various kinds, is merely a cone of bunting attached to a metal ring which is quickly filled or inflated by even the lightest zephyr which may be abroad.

There has always been a certain vague connection between the form of a weathervane and the type of building upon which it has been placed or of certain historical associations, and this sense of what might

be called the fitness of things has had its effect upon the designing of many of those recently planned. We are accustomed to the figure of a horse above a stable, and that of a gilded cock upon a church spire is so well known that the term "weathercock" has become synonymous with "weathervane." The use of the cock upon ecclesiastical buildings, often supposed to refer to St. Peter's denial of our Lord, is susceptible to a far more worthy interpretation. The cock, being the herald of the morn and of all the animals the first to awake, typifies the unceasing vigilance and watchfulness of the Church particularly when, placed on high, it veers about to view the world in every direction. On the spire of the old church at Marblehead and also upon the dome of the Boston State House there are very old weathervanes in the form of codfish—wholly appropriate when one remembers that the cod brought prestige and affluence to entire generations of Marblehead's fishermen and that it has always been identified in a particular way with the commonwealth of Massachusetts. Another famous American weathervane

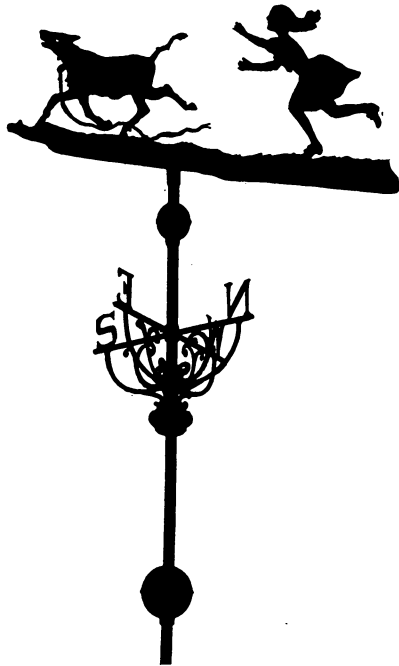


VANE FOR DAIRY. DESIGNED BY ALFRED HOPKINS

is that upon Faneuil Hall in the form of a grasshopper. Being itself the very type and symbol of mutability and change the vane may very fittingly assume a vast variety of appearances making it equally appropriate upon buildings of widely different types. Where used at all it may well afford some idea of the character of the building or the purpose for which it is used. Should the weathervane surmount a garage it may assume the form of a motor being driven through the blue vault of heaven and rich indeed is the opportunity for clever designing when the building is a barn, a stable or a farm structure of almost any kind. Upon a gate lodge or a coaching club a vane may be in the form of a coach and four; upon a gardener's cottage it may show the gardener watering his plants or upon a school house it may be in the form of a quill pen. A highly decorative ship is always appropriate when used as a weathervane upon a boathouse, a yacht club or upon a structure identified in any way with the water or with maritime pursuits. Some country homes where weather vanes are in use are fitted with dials, much resembling the dials of clocks,

in the halls or the living rooms, where the direction of the wind is indicated by an electrical device connected with the vane outside.

Notwithstanding its highly decorative qualities a weathervane need not be unduly difficult to make and it may be safely attempted by anyone possessed of even ordinary ability as a craftsman. The design must, of course, be prepared or drawn in silhouette and must be as bold and striking as possible and with very few details since, owing to the height from the ground at which it will be placed, such minutiae of design would be wholly lost. The design may be cut from very thin wood or from sheet metal; frequently it is made of two very thin sheets of metal with wood between. Any details which stand out from the body of the design should be strongly braced or reinforced for it must



VANE FOR CORN BARN. DESIGNED BY ALFRED HOPKINS
MORTIMER SCHIFF ESTATE



VANE SUITABLE FOR BOATHOUSE OR DOCK

be remembered that the vane will have to buffet the fierce gales of winter as well as to encounter the gentle zephyrs of summer and it must be built accordingly.

The weathervane must swing or pivot easily upon its vertical support; there must be nothing to interfere with its being so easily and readily moved that it will quickly respond to the lightest summer breeze it may have to indicate. There is but one other thing vitally necessary to the vane's complete success, and it is not difficult to attain: the placing of the weathervane upon its upright support must be so done that the weight will be evenly distributed upon the two sides but at the same time the greater bulk or expanse of surface must be upon the side opposite that which is intended to face the wind. This preserving of the balance of weight irrespective of the matter of expanse may be easily managed by a little judicious "weighting" of some sort, but unless it be done the vane may be destroyed, or badly bent by the wind—in any event it will be unreliable and everything which a useful and reliable weathervane should not be.

For general use a vane painted black seems to be preferable to a vane either

gilded or painted in colors though since there are no rules upon the subject one may follow one's inclination without breaking any architectural or artistic law. We are accustomed to seeing silhouettes cut from black substances and, as weathervanes are almost invariably cut "en silhouette," black seems to be the most appropriate for its use. Gilded vanes are often appropriate upon church spires, and some of the ancient gilded vanes have acquired most wonderful tones of brown or purple owing to the action of the weather upon imperishable gold leaf, but like vanes painted in many colors, gilded vanes—unless they be of extraordinary size—are apt to appear weak and lacking in the fanciful dignity which a successful weathervane should possess.

A great part of the decorative effect of vanes depends upon their being very carefully and correctly placed. A weathervane should always accentuate some vitally important structural point or feature, or be placed where it will afford a definite touch of architectural balance. A vane is really the last, crowning bit of decorative finality, and if well designed and accurately placed it will bestow the touch of artistic emphasis.



VANE SUITABLE FOR POULTRY HOUSE

A weathervane upon one's country estate should possess much of the individuality and distinctiveness of the bookplate which indicates the ownership of the volumes in one's library. It is quite as much the medium of the expression of definite taste, and to select a stock weathervane from the wares of some dealer in iron work would be the equivalent of purchasing from some stationery shop a bookplate which may also be used by several hundred others. To test the value of such individuality one need only examine a weathervane which possesses definite character and contrast its life and vigor with the somewhat meaningless vanes which are only too numerous. The individual vane will always express much of the changing whimsicality of the wind the direction of which it records.

EDMUND GARRETT'S TUDOR DECORATIONS

BROOKSIDE HOUSE, GREAT BARRINGTON

ILLUSTRATIONS are to be found on the following pages of a series of exceedingly interesting decorative panels painted by Mr. Edmund H. Garrett of Boston for the library of Brookside House, the summer home of William Hall Walker, Esquire, at Great Barrington, Mass.

These panels represent typical events of the time of the Reformation and the Renaissance in England, and the compositions have as central figures, chosen for symbolical significance, the historical characters of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth.

The first three of these have as subjects "Drinking Healths at the Field of The Cloth of Gold," "Henry VIII Meets Anne Boleyn in the Gardens at Hever Castle," and "Henry VIII is Shown Sir Thomas More's 'Utopia';" while the second three subjects are "Defense of Poetry," "Queen Elizabeth visits Kenilworth, 1575," and "Coronation of Queen Elizabeth" in addition to which there are single panels showing single figures "The Genius of the Reformation" and "The Spirit of the Renaissance."

They are frankly decorative and in no

sense easel pictures. It is said that the painter got the suggestion of style from some old-time playing cards, fine in design and color, but worked out his scheme with due deliberation and the utmost accuracy concerning the historical details.

The library at Brookside is Tudor-Gothic in style. At one end of the room is an elaborately carved screen with an entrance on each side, and surmounted by a minstrels' gallery. Opposite is a large Elizabethan bay-window with seats in the embrasure. The other two sides of the room are occupied by bookcases, interrupted on one side by the fireplace and on the other by a second window. It is over these bookcases that the decorative panels by Mr. Garrett have been placed. Thus both in setting and environment they are subjectively most appropriate.

It is good to occasionally in these days have such works of art as these, not to go "anywhere" as are the majority of easel pictures, but having a particular place and purpose. Under such conditions some of the greatest works of art in the past were created.